

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Amended): A method for using a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, comprising
- a voice-messaging system receiving a toll-free call placed by a user;
 - verifying that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;
 - receiving from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;
 - receiving from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;
- placing a telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party telephone number entered by the user; and
- charging a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.
2. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party telephone line if the third-party telephone line is available.
3. (Canceled):
4. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of verifying that the user is a valid user comprises receiving and verifying a user-identification code and a password code.
5. (Canceled):

6. (Previously Presented): The method as recited in claim 4, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

7. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system allows the user to choose between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

8. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party-call connection is not established.

9. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

10. (Original): The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party number comprises establishing a 3-way call between the user, the voice-messaging system and the third-party telephone line.

11. (Original): The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party number comprises:
establishing a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone line; and
disconnecting the voice-messaging system from the call.

12. (Original): The method as recited in claim 10, further comprising:
during or after the call between the user and the third party, receiving a pre-defined signal from the user; and
transferring the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu.

13. (Amended): An article of manufacture, comprising:
a computer-usable medium having a computer-readable program-code means embodied therein for causing a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, the computer-readable program-code means in said article of manufacture comprising:
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a toll-free call placed by a user;
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to place a telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party telephone number entered by the user; and
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to charge a pre-established user account of the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.

14. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone call if the third-party telephone line is available.

15. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive and verify a user-identification code and a password code.

16. (Canceled):

17. (Previously Presented): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 15, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

18. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to provide the user a choice between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

19. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party call connection is not established.

20. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

21. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 14, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone call comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to establish a three-way call between the user, the voice-messaging system and the third-party telephone line.

22. (Original): The article of manufacture of claim 14, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone line comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to establish a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone line; and computer-readable program means for causing a computer to disconnect the voice messaging system from the call.

23. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 21, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a pre-defined signal from the user during or after the call between the user and the third party; and

computer-readable program means for causing a computer to transfer the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu.

24. (Amended): A method of using a voice messaging system to place a telephone call, comprising:

establishing a user account for a user, wherein the user account has associated with it pre-determined rates for placing telephone calls using the voice messaging system;

issuing the user an user-identification code and a password code associated with the user account;

providing the user a toll-free number by which to access the voice messaging system;

receiving a call from the user via the toll-free number;

verifying that the user is a valid user by receiving and verifying the user-identification code and password code associated with the user account;

receiving a request from the user to place a telephone call;

receiving from the user the telephone number to call;

placing the call to the telephone number; and

charging the user account of the user the pre-determined rates if the call is connected.